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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)  
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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1. Mideast
2. Syria-Iran "Common Front"

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Key stories in the media:  
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All media quoted President Bush as saying at a news conference on Thursday: "If I was the leader of Israel and I listened to some of the statements by the Iranian ayatollahs ... that regarded [the] security of my country, I'd be concerned about Iran having a nuclear weapon, as well. And in that Israel is our ally, and in that we've made a very strong commitment to support Israel, we will support Israel if ... their security is threatened."

All media reported that on Thursday, Attorney General Menachem Mazuz announced an indictment against PM Sharon's son, Knesset member Omri Sharon, and to close for lack of evidence the investigation against PM Sharon in the case of the straw companies allegedly set up to raise and disburse funds for Ariel Sharon's 1999 primaries campaign. The media write that Omri Sharon could face a jail sentence.

All media reported that the cabinet is expected to approve two significant decisions on Sunday -- the evacuation of settlements in the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank, in accordance with the disengagement plan, and fixing the new route for the separation fence in the West Bank, in the wake of changes ordered by the High Court of Justice. -The fence will include the Etzion Bloc, Ariel, and, for the first time, Ma'aleh Adumim -- altogether 7 percent of the West Bank. Jerusalem Post reported that the Defense Ministry told the Knesset's Defense Budget Committee on Thursday that the fence will be completed only in mid-2006, a year later than scheduled, because of petitions to the High Court of Justice that required changes to the route. -Yediot notes that the first settlement will be evacuated between April 30 and May 2.

Leading media reported that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz Thursday ended the policy of demolishing houses belonging to terrorists' families.

Ha'aretz reported that on Thursday, Sharon told Lt. Gen William Ward, the new U.S. security envoy, that reform of the Palestinian security services is paramount to the revival of Middle East peacemaking. The newspaper cited Sharon's office as saying that Ward told Sharon that he intended to focus on security reform, and that he hoped to create a PA security apparatus that would be "both capable of and committed to fighting terrorism and its infrastructures." Jerusalem Post quoted a senior Israeli diplomatic official as saying on Thursday, following the Sharon-Ward meeting, that Ward will serve as a barrier keeping the Europeans from sending military personnel to boost the PA's security apparatus. Yediot captioned a picture of Ward with Sharon: "The Middle East's New Cop."

Senior PA security official Muhammad Dahlan told Israel Radio that PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas and Palestinian PM Ahmed Qurei are determined to ensure that Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip takes places quietly. Dahlan also said that Israel has not yet carried out the easing measures it has committed itself to, and hinted that if Israel does not pull out from the

Philadelphi route along the Gaza-Egypt border, attacks would occur there. Leading media reported that Mofaz announced Thursday that 20 Palestinians who were among the 39 exiled to Europe and the Gaza Strip as part of a deal to end the standoff in Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity in May 2002 will be permitted to return once the Palestinians receive security control of Bethlehem.

Channel 2-TV reported Thursday that Mohammed al-Alabbar, a property magnate from the UAE, is interested in buying the assets left in the Gaza Strip settlements for USD 56 million if Israel refrains from demolishing them. The station said that al-Alabbar visited Israel and met with Sharon following a meeting with Abbas. Israel Radio said that in the past al-Alabbar met several times with Prime Minister's Office D-G Ilan Cohen. Labor Knesset Member Ephraim Sneh told Channel 2-TV that he was the intermediary between al-Alabbar and Sharon's office. However, Ha'aretz quoted GOI sources as saying that Sharon is determined to knock all the homes down. Conversely, Vice Premier Shimon Peres told Israel Radio this morning that Sharon has not ruled out the deal.

Globes web site reported that this week Union of Local Authorities Chairman Adi Eldar and four deputies visited Israel for a secret meeting with the heads of Palestinian local authorities, in order to promote peace and cooperation.

Jerusalem Post reported that Israel is removing hundreds of Bedouin families squatting just beyond the perimeter fence of its main Negev air base because it fears that they may acquire antiaircraft missiles and it wants to distance them from the IAF planes.

Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli and Palestinian human rights groups on Thursday appealed to Abbas to rescind his decision to ratify death sentences passed against scores of Palestinians, including suspected "collaborators" with Israel. Yediot reported that for the first time since 1979, an Egyptian newspaper (Al-Ahram) interviewed Sharon.

Dan Senor, the former spokesman for the U.S. occupation government in Iraq, was quoted as saying Thursday in an interview with Jerusalem Post that Ahmed Chalabi is likely to emerge as Iraq's leader, as originally envisioned by the U.S.

Globes reported that during a debate at the Israel-America Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM), its President, Zalman Shoval, said that the deficit in trade relations with the U.S. and the fact that it has not decreased in the past several years, is detrimental to the bilateral relations.

Leading media reported that on Thursday, President Bush named Ambassador John Negroponte the United States' first national intelligence director.

Yediot cited a Gallup poll conducted in the U.S. February 7-10, which found that 69 percent of the U.S. public, the highest level in nearly six years, regard Israel positively. More Americans -- 29 percent -- have a positive view of the PA than in any previous poll, although 62 percent still have a negative view of it.

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1. Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The settlers are playing with fire.... Failure to carry out the disengagement plan will mean that Israel wants the occupation to continue."

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized: "Even after the Disengagement Plan Implementation Law has been approved, one should strive to have it canceled."

President of the (U.S.) Council on Foreign Relations Richard N. Haass, who served as director of policy planning in the State Department during the first term of George Bush's presidency, wrote in Ha'aretz: "The U.S. should not ... make the establishment of a full Palestinian democracy a prerequisite for territorial return and peace."

Block Quotes:  
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#### I. "Intifada III"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (February 18): "The sun has barely set on the Sharm el-Sheikh summit that officially ended the Al Aqsa Intifada, and Intifada III has already erupted. Only this time, it's the settlers who are at it -- Jews against Jews. An extremist minority is clashing with a Jewish majority, trying to sabotage the Sharm accord or any other agreement that brings the occupation to an end.... The settlers are playing with fire. They want to create a trauma that will wreck any chance of an agreement.... The real danger lies in the plans of the extremists to paralyze the country and create such havoc that Israel's leaders may have second thoughts. What we're talking about is a hair-raising spectacle of provocation, death threats and insurrection that could balloon to monstrous proportions if not nipped in the bud.... [The extremists] have resources and a pile of money. They have the power to upset life in Israel and create a situation that the law enforcement authorities can do nothing about. If this homegrown Intifada wins, the State of Israel in its democratic configuration will no longer exist. Failure to carry out the disengagement plan will mean that Israel wants the occupation to continue. Not only will America withdraw its support of our right to maintain settlement blocs in the West Bank and our objection to a Palestinian right of return, the whole world will justify Intifada IV -- an all-out war that the Palestinians are bound to declare on Israel. If this homegrown Intifada wins, no heir of Sharon will be able to put the pieces back together."

#### II. "Breakdown of the Disengagement Plan Implementation Law"

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized (February 18): "On Wednesday, [the Knesset] passed the Disengagement Plan Implementation Law. The road has been paved for the expulsion of the Jewish settlers from the Katif Bloc and some settlements in the northernmost West Bank.... It would be difficult to view the withdrawal policy as one from which peace would sprout.... It is a fact that referring to an arrangement with Israel, Palestinian Authority Abu Mazen said that he is not satisfied with an Israeli pullout from the Gaza Strip. He stated it was a requisite condition'.... Even after the Disengagement Plan Implementation Law has been approved, one should strive to have it canceled. It must be amended as soon as possible. This is what Jewish logic says. Let us learn from the Baltic states."

#### III. "Abbas Should Get a Letter From Bush, Too"

President of the (U.S.) Council on Foreign Relations Richard N. Haass, who served as director of policy planning in the State Department during the first term of George Bush's presidency, wrote in Ha'aretz (February 18): "What Palestinians would need to pledge in return [for guarantees by President Bush regarding the establishment of a Palestinian state] is to reject violence and terror, once and for all time. The U.S. should not, however, make the establishment of a full Palestinian democracy a prerequisite for territorial return and peace. To delay negotiations until Palestinian democracy has matured would only persuade Palestinians that diplomacy was a ruse and give many reasons to turn to violence. After more than half a century of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, translating opportunity into reality will be difficult enough without introducing new requirements that, however desirable, are not essential."

#### 12. Syria-Iran "Common Front":

##### Summary:

Columnist Orly Halpern wrote on page one of conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "This week the two outcasts [Iran and Syria] decided to form a club. Russia is an integral supporter; the U.S. and Israel are the bullies to be kept out."

##### Block Quotes:

"Outcasts Iran and Syria Deepen Their Alliance"

Columnist Orly Halpern wrote on page one of conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (February 18): "Lebanon, in Syria's backyard, is filled with people

calling Syria names and accusing it of murder. The Iraqi neighbors are accusing Syria of supporting the Iraqi insurgency. The Jordanians and Turks are neutral, not wanting to upset their big U.S. patron because, although Syria is not on the official U.S. 'Axis of Evil' list, as is Iran, it is undoubtedly an honorary member. And the Israelis are -- well, Israelis. The only one in the neighborhood willing to befriend the local outcast is Iran, itself not one of the most popular kids on the block, because of its development of nuclear capabilities. This week the two outcasts decided to form a club. Russia is an integral supporter; the U.S. and Israel are the bullies to be kept out."

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